
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	901 D Street, NE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	February 28, 2013	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	13-028	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicant 901 D Street, LLC, with drawings prepared by R2L: Architects, PLLC, requests concept approval for alterations and new construction at the former Edmonds School site at 901 D Street, NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

The James B. Edmonds School, located at the corner of 9th and D Streets, NE, was constructed in 1903 according to designs prepared by the architecture team of Marsh & Peter. Colonial Revival in design, the building reflects the city's preferred school building layout of the time. Known as the "eight-room cartwheel plan," the layout included playrooms and bathrooms for boys and girls in the basement. Four classrooms and their respective cloakrooms opened into a central hall on each of the upper floors.

During the mid-twentieth-century, the lot was paved with concrete, including the public space front yards fronting 9th Street and D Street. In the 1970s, a small concrete and brick plaza was added on the 9th Street side. The school was closed in 1979, and soon after it was taken over by the DC Teacher's Credit Union, with this organization and others operating office space inside the building since. These groups are now relocating, and the site has become available for purchase.

Proposal

At the November hearing, the Board approved the proposed subdivision and interior and exterior alterations to the historic building. The Board also found the proposed site plan and the general massing of new construction to be compatible. The Board directed the applicants to continue work on the façade of the D Street house, rear and side elevations for the new townhouses and the connector piece on 9th Street, elevations and materials for the covered parking structure, and design details for the basement terrace railings for the historic building. Those elements have been further developed, and the applicants are seeking final concept approval.

The D Street house has been redesigned as a brick bay-front similar to the three new townhouses facing 9th Street. The rear elevations of all four townhouses have been further developed, with those fronting 9th Street taking on a more contemporary expression in materials, fenestration, and

overall design. The covered parking structure is presented as a simple, open garage, which is clad in siding with a deck above.

Three changes have been made to the plans since the Board's last review. Roof decks and rooftop deck access structures have been added to all four townhouses. A new landscaping plan has been developed in order to eliminate the basement terrace railings by instead gently increasing the berm as it ascends towards the school building. Additionally, several of the basement-level windows are proposed for lengthening.

Evaluation

The new design direction for the D Street townhouse is quite successful. The previous porch-front design struggled to relate to the historic porch-front houses to the east in terms of window, door, and porch proportions. The new bay-front massing alleviates the inconsistencies and also ties together the project more successfully. At the suggestion of HPO, the bay of the D Street house extends two stories in height rather than three, allowing for some relief in massing between the new house and the historic school building. The applicants have also developed side and rear elevations for this new building, and it is compatible with the character of the neighborhood.

The covered parking structure, which is located at the far corner of the parking lot and against backyards of a higher grade, does not raise any major preservation issues. Though the rear elevations of the three townhouses facing 9th Street are of a more contemporary design direction than other elements of the project, these elevations are largely obscured from view and have been streamlined since the earliest drawings.

In the few cases where the Board has approved basement-level terraces in public space, screening these areaways from view has been essential. This is typically achieved by setting back the areaway from the sidewalk, limiting the projection of the areaway from the affected building, and ensuring that green space in front of the areaways is heavily landscaped. For all of these efforts, the tell-tale railings around basement areaways generally call attention to these alterations. Since the Board's last review, the applicants have sought out a way to submerge the needed guardrail system into the landscaping, rather than introducing the visual intrusion of railings above-grade. A solution has been found in which the already sloping berm will be slightly raised in front of each areaway using low retaining walls on each side, which disappear into the berm. In addition to foregoing the railings, this solution provides more opportunities for landscaping.

Since the Board's last review, the applicants have also proposed to lengthen several of the basement-level windows in order to provide more light and air. Understanding that the existing basement-level windows are quite far above floor-height, this seems like a reasonable solution as long as the change can be made visually unobtrusive. Consistent with the Board's guidelines for basement areaways and windows, the enlargement will be achieved by simply dropping the sill and maintaining the existing width and window headers. Given the setback from the sidewalk, landscape screening, and below-grade nature of the alteration, this will be a compatible and visually unobtrusive change.

Because no side elevations were provided in the previous round of reviews, further information on the connector piece was needed in order to understand its structural relationship to the historic school. Specifically, it was difficult at the time to ascertain whether the connector piece would perhaps intersect with, and therefore damage, some of the existing decorative medallions encircling the roofline of the school. The Board required that the height of the connector piece be located below the medallions and the brick course directly below this area, with this detail shown in a drawing of the south-facing elevation. This drawing has been included (p. 18), and it unfortunately appears that the connector piece will engage with at least three of the medallions and with the brick course. The applicants should work with HPO as construction drawings are prepared in order to find a solution that minimizes this damage.

The Board has generally required that rooftop decks and rooftop access structures on historic buildings be set back to such an extent that they are not visible from the street. Some minor flexibility has been afforded for new construction, and railings and/or access structures are somewhat visible in long views of Capitol Hill projects such as the Bryan School townhouses, new houses in the unit block of D Street, SE, new houses in the 200 block of D Street, SE, and new houses in the 1300 block of South Carolina Avenue, SE. Perspective renderings provided by the applicants (p. 26) demonstrate that rooftop elements in this project will be somewhat visible in street views. The applicants should work with HPO as final construction plans are prepared to explore how minor adjustments to the railing setback and access structure height might alleviate visibility.

ANC 6A did not formally review the project again following the November Board hearing.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff, with the following conditions:

- *the design of the connector piece on 9th Street should be restudied in consultation with HPO to minimize damage to the existing decorative medallions and brick coursing on the school building;*
- *the setback of roof deck railings and the height of rooftop access structures should be further explored in consultation with HPO in order to minimize visibility of these elements from the street;*
- *concept approval shall not be construed as approval for any necessary zoning relief.*